



# Artifice and Persuasion: The Work of Metaphor in the Rhetoric

## Citation

Moran, Richard. 1996. Artifice and persuasion: The work of metaphor in the rhetoric. In *Essays on Aristotle's rhetoric*, ed. Amelie Oksenberg Rorty, 385-398. Berkeley: University of California Press.

## Published Version

<http://www.ucpress.edu/books/pages/6682.php>

## Permanent link

<http://nrs.harvard.edu/urn-3:HUL.InstRepos:3322257>

## Terms of Use

This article was downloaded from Harvard University's DASH repository, and is made available under the terms and conditions applicable to Other Posted Material, as set forth at <http://nrs.harvard.edu/urn-3:HUL.InstRepos:dash.current.terms-of-use#LAA>

## Share Your Story

The Harvard community has made this article openly available.  
Please share how this access benefits you. [Submit a story](#).

[Accessibility](#)

*From: Philosophical Essays on Aristotle's 'Rhetoric',  
Amelie O. Rorty, ed., (University of California, 1995)*

## ARTIFICE AND PERSUASION:

### THE WORK OF METAPHOR IN THE RHETORIC

"What, indeed, would be the good of the speaker, if things appeared in the required light even apart from anything he says?"

Poetics, 1456b8

The distinction between the literal and the metaphorical has never been a merely descriptive one. From its origins in ancient Greek thought, G.E.R. Lloyd reminds us that, as with the development of the category of myth as fiction, "the invention of the category of the metaphorical took place against a background of overt polemic." (Lloyd, p. 172). And the philosophers engaged in this polemic left no doubt as to which side of the conceptual divide they were placing themselves on. Like the more recent invention of the category of the ideological, the concept of the metaphorical is originally devised for application to the discourse of others. It is itself a rhetorical weapon.

Traces of this polemic are discernible in some Pre-Socratic debate, and Plato's writings are rich both in figurative invention and in condemnation of the seductive errors wrought by rhetorical tropes. But we do not find there the analysis of concepts answering to our distinction between the literal and the metaphorical, and it is not until Aristotle that metaphor per se

becomes an explicit subject for philosophical reflection. Even Aristotle's conception of 'metaphora' is not exactly coextensive with our contemporary 'metaphor'. The familiar root sense of 'metaphora' is that of a transfer [epiphora] of a word or name from its home context to another one. But this definition is general enough to apply to many usages that would not ordinarily come under our contemporary understanding of metaphor. And indeed, for Aristotle, the "transfer from genus to species or from species to genus" [Poetics 1457b8] will be taken to include such phrases as 'Odysseus did a thousand noble deeds' (since 'a thousand' is a species of 'many'), or saying that a thief has 'taken' rather than 'stolen' something [Rhetoric 1405a27], and even the case of referring to something as 'completely' destroyed, or to death as the end of life [Metaphysics 1021b26-30]. These are all metaphora. Whereas for us, usages of this sort would either be thought of as perfectly literal or at least as belonging to some other category than the metaphorical.

Nonetheless, the conceptual relation is close enough to make Aristotle's problems ours. Most contemporary philosophical discussions of metaphor have treated it as a problem in the philosophy of language, and much recent debate has centered on the question of whether or not there is such a thing as specifically 'metaphorical meaning', and if so, how it is related to literal meaning. These are not Aristotle's problems, but the issues which concern him with respect to the rhetorical uses of metaphor are as much with us as ever. These center on such questions as: How does metaphor persuade, what qualities specific to it enable it to play such a role, and how do its workings compare with those of explicit, literal argument? To what extent is metaphor a legitimate vehicle of understanding, and to what extent does its rhetorical usefulness depend on unclarity, on the part of the audience, about its functioning? Without presenting anything like a

theory of how metaphor functions, Aristotle's discussion of metaphor in the Rhetoric points in certain directions for seeking answers to such questions which contemporary discussion would do well to follow up. This brief discussion can only aim to bring out a couple of such problems, and suggest ways in which they may be resolvable within the terms of Aristotle's text.

As the first philosopher to direct sustained theoretical attention to the specific workings of metaphor, Aristotle is famously ambivalent about its power and appropriateness in philosophy. He will sometimes charge other philosophers (e.g., Plato) with failing to provide genuine explanations, and instead dealing in "empty words and poetical metaphors"<sup>1</sup>, and he asserts categorically in the Topics (139b34) that "everything is unclear [asaphes] that is said by metaphor." His attitude is not always so dismissive, however, not even in philosophical contexts, and he often makes explicit mention of particular metaphorical transfers that are not only harmless, but are seen as actually instructive.<sup>2</sup> And in fact, when he comes to consider metaphor in the Rhetoric (1405a8) he claims for it the special virtue of being clear [saphes], ascribing to it the very quality (and "to a high degree") which he withheld from metaphor

---

<sup>1</sup> <sup>1</sup> "And to say that they [Plato's Forms] are patterns and the other things share in them is to use empty words and poetical metaphors." (Metaphysics, 991a21, see also 1079b26).

<sup>2</sup> <sup>2</sup> See Metaphysics 1015a11, on the transfer between nature and essence. See also Metaphysics 1019b34 on potency or power in geometry, and Nicomachean Ethics 1167a10 on transferring [metapheron] the name 'friendship' [philia] to benevolence [eunoia], as a kind of 'inactive' friendship.

altogether in the Topics. Further, his account in the Rhetoric of what metaphor accomplishes would appear to give it a valuable place within the concerns of philosophy generally. "We learn above all from metaphors"(1410b 12), he tells us, and his fondness for analyzing all metaphors as proportional figures makes him emphasize their role in teaching in particular the categorical relations between things (e.g., between genus and species). And indeed, he relates the operation of metaphor and philosophical understanding explicitly, when he says "Metaphor must be by transference from things that are related, but not obviously so, as it is a sign of sound intuition in a philosopher to see similarities between things that are far apart." (1412a 10-13)

This sketch is not meant to suggest that all traces of ambivalence about metaphor are absent from the Rhetoric itself. Book Three begins with a brief review of the development of the art of lexis or style, which includes some disparaging comparisons of the rhetorician with an actor (a favorite Platonic comparison), as well as the complaint that nowadays the actors have become more important than the poets whose lines they speak (1403b33). Metaphor is understood as one of the elements of lexis; but even though the last of the three books of the Rhetoric is devoted to the discussion of style and arrangement, Aristotle takes the fact of its importance to be mostly regrettable. In the context of civic discourse, he sees attention to style or delivery to be necessary only due to the corruption of political life (1403b34, 1404a5). In a better world, those in public debate would concern themselves only with the facts of the case, and seek to give neither pleasure nor offence.

\* \* \*

Nonetheless, being pleasing [hedu] is one of the three primary virtues assigned to metaphor, the other two being lucidity [saphes], as mentioned, and strangeness [xenikon] (1405a8). Regarding strangeness, Aristotle begins his discussion by grouping together figurative language with unusual words and foreign borrowings. All of these may serve to elevate one's style, and lend an appearance of dignity [semnos] to the discourse (1404b9). At first, this may seem an odd assortment of verbal devices to group together; yet there is a good sense in which metaphor is indeed a borrowing, not from a foreign language, but from one region of a language to another. In metaphor the term is temporarily employed outside its home context, to which it continually returns. Foreignness is described here as a positive virtue of lexis, and not simply as something to be tolerated as an inevitable aspect of anything that could count as metaphor.

Aristotle explicates this idea in a striking metaphor of his own.

Men feel toward language as they feel toward strangers [xenous]  
and fellow citizens, and we must introduce an element of  
strangeness into our diction because people marvel at what is far  
away, and to marvel is pleasant.

1404b9-12

Thus, metaphor is figured as having some of the qualities of the exotic and the fascinating; but at the same time we recognize that strangers do not have the same rights as our fellow citizens. They easily fall under suspicion, their loyalty is not to be trusted, and they can be expelled as soon as their services are no longer needed. Thus a kind of ambivalence colors even the description of the specific virtues of metaphor, before we come to consider its functioning.

How do the specific virtues ascribed to metaphor contribute to the general aim of the art of rhetoric? In providing an occasion for marvelling, strangeness contributes to pleasure in a

straightforward way. But that same quality may, of course, conflict with the third virtue of lucidity, and thus defeat the aims of the rhetorician. This tension among the virtues particular to metaphor is, however, considerably less problematic than a related one which follows immediately in Aristotle's discussion, and which suggests that clarity itself, at another level, may conflict with the goals of rhetoric. At the beginning of Book One we learn that "Rhetoric may be defined as the faculty of observing in any given case the available means of persuasion." (1355b27). We now learn in Book Three that attaining this very aim is interfered with by its being too obvious that this is what the speaker is seeking. This is especially so to the extent that skill or artifice in composition or delivery is manifest in the speech.

One must not be obviously composing; one must seem to be speaking in a natural and unstudied manner, for what is natural is convincing [pithanon], what is studied [peplasmenos] is not. People distrust rhetorical tricks just as they distrust adulterated wines.<sup>3</sup>

1404b19-21

Thus, while it is a virtue of style in general, and metaphor in particular, to be clear or manifest, the aims of style and metaphor seem to require an absence of clarity about themselves, a concealment of their artfulness and their aims.<sup>4</sup> Perhaps it is meant to be obvious why such

---

<sup>3</sup> <sup>3</sup> In ordinary contexts of action, peplasmenos refers to something done by artifice or pretence. A bit later in the text, Aristotle describes the operations of metaphor in even stronger terms suggestive of a kind of 'theft' [kekleptai] (1404b24, 1405a30).

<sup>4</sup> <sup>4</sup> Longinus also claims that rhetorical figures will be most effective when their figurality

artifice in public speech is mistrusted. And perhaps it is especially advisable in a democracy for a public speaker to appear "to be speaking in a natural voice". For persuasiveness is not only a matter of what is said and how it is said, but also a matter of the trustworthiness of the character of the speaker. Indeed, early in Book One Aristotle says that "his character may almost be called the most effective means of persuasion he possesses." (1356a13). The audience must see the speaker not only as reliable in the sense of well-informed, but also in the sense of being possessed of a good character, and not liable to seek to manipulate them.

However, this appeal to the character of the speaker assumes that we already know just what there is to be mistrusted in the use of highly 'composed' or skillful diction [*lexis*]. The appearance of artifice may indeed make the audience suspicious of the character of the speaker, and his speech will then lose in persuasiveness. But what is the basis of the suspicion of such artifice in the first place? This question is especially pressing in the context of Aristotle's discussion of metaphor since the primary focus of his account of what metaphor accomplishes is the "ease of learning" of various unobvious systems of relations (1410b10). It is not immediately apparent what there is to be suspicious of in *that*, and Aristotle will say little that is explicit about what there is in the 'composed' character of metaphor that would need concealment.<sup>5</sup>

---

is concealed, in Chapter 17 of his treatise On the Sublime.

<sup>5</sup> Other forms of artifice are also to be avoided in the interests of convincingness. At 1408b22 Aristotle says that prose should not be metrical, for the reason that "metrical prose is unconvincing [*apithanon*] because it betrays artifice [*peplasthai*]." Even if we agree with this point in the case of prose, this raises a question of how we are to account for the persuasiveness



The kind of suspicion at issue here is specifically concerned with persuasion, and is therefore to be distinguished from other ways in which we in the audience may be 'tricked', and may take pleasure in that very experience. The artifice involved in riddles or in wit also needs to be concealed, at least for a time, in order to function. A riddle may set up a certain expectation, only in order to defeat it; and whatever pleasure we take in this depends on our not seeing through the trick at once. (See the joke about the sandals and chilblains at 1412a 30.) There is a kind of deception [exapatán] in this, and a pleasure taken in that very deception. But it is much less puzzling than the relation of pleasure and deception with respect to the art of rhetoric and metaphor, since such a riddle does not involve persuasion [peitho] about some matter.

In the context of persuasion this recommendation of concealing one's art also raises questions about the situation of the audience, and its understanding of itself. On the one hand, we marvel at what is strange in diction, and take pleasure in this marvelling. On the other hand, we are said to mistrust the speaker to the extent that he does not conceal his intention to compose in such a way as to give us this pleasure. If a certain kind of speaker were of a sort that was seen to be simply untrustworthy or unreliable or ill-informed, it would make sense for us to simply avoid him, refuse him our ear. Were we to listen to him, we would be liable to be misled, and we have no desire simply to believe what is false.

---

of poetry itself which is metrical and artificial, and is, of course, known by both speaker and audience to be so.

But this is not what we in fact do with respect to the rhetorically skillful speaker. We recognize that his speech gives us pleasure, and not in virtue of being unreliable, but in at least two ways mentioned by Aristotle. First, as mentioned, his diction presents us with something strange and far off to marvel at [to thaumaston]. And secondly, he provides us an occasion for learning something with ease [1410b 10]. And both the marvelling and the learning are said to be pleasant or sweet [hedu]. We are of at least two minds about this pleasure, however, for awareness of the speaker's art and intent to provide that pleasure makes us less inclined to believe what he is telling us. Note that what Aristotle says is not simply that the pleasure will be lost, say, either through awkwardness or self-consciousness. What he says at 1404b20 is that if the speaker is obviously composing, then his speech will invite suspicion and fail to carry conviction [pithanon]. Hence we in the audience know ourselves to be inclined to be moved to conviction in ways which we ourselves do not credit or find justified. We will come to believe things in ways which we would reject if we were to be made aware of them. And we will knowingly make ourselves available to those speakers and situations which put us in this position. We want the orator to move us, but in ways which require that he distract us from the fact that this is what he is doing.

It is as if we in the audience know ourselves to be akratic with respect to the gratifications of oratory. We know we will not in fact avoid the speeches of the skillful orator, because it is in part his business to provide pleasure, and we will make ourselves available to that pleasure. But the explanation of our double-mindedness cannot be that we want the pleasure without the risk of being persuaded of something unwarranted, for how would it help that for the speaker to conceal his art and his intent? In that case the risk would only be the greater, for

being unknown to us.

As a final problem, concerning metaphor in particular, it is not clear that the actual concealing of the art and intention of the speaker is even initially consistent with aim of speaking to an audience, intending to communicate something. For a metaphorical utterance must be known to be one if it is to be understood at all, or understood in the right way. If the audience does not realize that the speaker is speaking figuratively (i.e., non-literally) they will not be moved by his speech, and they will not be convinced by what he says. They could only take him to be misapplying his words (for example, in referring to Achilles as a lion), and perhaps failing to make sense altogether. Neither the effects of pleasure or persuasion will be attained unless the audience is quite aware that they are being addressed by a speaker who is deliberately employing some specifically composed figure of speech. So, in addition to the question of why the speaker should need to conceal his art, there is the question of how it could be possible for him to do so if he is not to produce mere confusion in his audience. And it will not clarify matters to say at this point that the speaker needs the audience to have some awareness of the fact that he is deliberately composing and speaking figuratively, but just not too much awareness.

\* \* \*

As mentioned, Aristotle's insistence on the need for suppressing the appearance of artifice in figurative speech is particularly surprising in the light of what he says about what metaphor accomplishes. Throughout his remarks about the general function of metaphor he is quite generous in his praise.

[H]uman nature delights in learning something with ease. Words express a meaning, and those words are the most pleasing which make us learn something. [...] We learn above all from metaphors. [...] We are attracted by those things which we understand as soon as they are said or very soon afterwards, even though we had no knowledge of them before, for then there is a learning process, or something very like it [...].

1410b9-25 passim

To understand Aristotle's picture of the rhetorical functioning of metaphor, and the problematic role of the appearance of artifice, we need to start by looking more closely at the complex interrelations between pleasure and learning, and how they contribute to each other. For if we just consider them independently, it is clear enough that they are both good things, and then it is hard to see the necessity of anything hidden in a process involving them both. The suspicion of artifice, on the other hand, requires reference to a prior role for pleasure in bringing one to find persuasive something one would otherwise be unconvinced by. As we have seen, metaphor leads to the perception of systems of resemblance, which, as a species of learning, is itself pleasurable. Everything at this stage may be fully manifest. But pleasure does not only attend the learning of something new, it can also play a prior contributory role in changing someone's mind, a role whose legitimacy will be open to question. This is not, however, because pleasure is itself presented as a reason for believing anything. The rhetorician is not striking a kind of bargain with his audience; as it were, trading pleasure for conviction. (That would involve a

kind of self-deception that Aristotle nowhere suggests is part of rhetorical persuasion.) Rather, there is a prior role for pleasure in making one receptive to the speaker, relaxing one's suspicions, and imaginatively entering into a different viewpoint. As Aristotle puts it early in Book I of the Rhetoric, "Persuasion may come through the hearers, when the speech stirs their emotions. Our judgements when we are pleased and friendly are not the same as when we are pained and hostile." (1356a14-16).

There is pleasure, then, at both ends of the process of the rhetorical functioning of metaphor. It is a movement of the soul that makes one receptive, and thus facilitates other such movements, including patterns of attention and the entertaining of ideas. One begins to associate and explore the implications of certain comparisons in ways which one would not have otherwise done, but for the pleasure induced by the speaker. His speech has, for the time being, altered the contents and activity of one's mind. And since this grasping of ideas is itself pleasurable, we can expect such a process to have a certain momentum, as pleasure induces learning something new, which in turn, as pleasurable, induces further responsiveness and ideational activity. All of this the rhetorician is counting on, and seeking to channel in certain directions.

The artifice of metaphor contributes to each stage of this process. But it is not either the grasping of new ideas or the pleasure that attends it that breeds mistrust of the speaker. Rather, suspicion enters in when the obtrusive appearance of artifice raises the question of the speaker's designs upon us. Since we are aware that pleasure is disarming (and take the speaker also to be so aware), if he seems too manifestly intent on pleasing us, we will begin to question how he intends to exploit this disarmed state, and thus re-arm ourselves. Further, the speaker's overt desire to please highlights a questionable imbalance in the situation of speaker and audience. For

as the desire to please becomes more transparent, this clashes more suspiciously with the fact that his communicative aim is not fully 'mutual' between speaker and hearer, since his ultimate rhetorical intentions, and the function of his chosen metaphor within them, are only imperfectly understood by the audience. Following the speaker in figurative thought thus requires an extension of trust to take up the slack of mutuality; and the speaker who seeks our trust had best not call attention to just how deeply he will be drawing on it.

\* \* \*

There is a further way for Aristotle in which the rhetorical effectiveness of metaphor relies on the apparent withdrawal from the scene of the speaker's assertive intention. This concerns the imagistic and quasi-experiential role he assigns to the reception of successful metaphor. Figurative language does not simply tell us that one thing is like another; rather, it functions in such a way as to make us see one thing as another, or in the light of another. Such a description of the workings of metaphor is, of course, itself metaphorical and not literal. It requires explication of its own. But it is in many ways the privileged metaphor for the functioning of metaphor, and it has its origins in Aristotle's insistence, throughout the Rhetoric, that the successful metaphor will "set things before the eyes" of the audience, and that this quasi-experiential effect will be crucial to both the convincingness and the emotional appeal of the speech. It is no exaggeration to say that the primary virtue of metaphor is for Aristotle the ability to set something vividly before the eyes of the audience [pro ommaton poiein] (1410b34).

There are several aspects to Aristotle's 'quasi-experiential' aspect of metaphor, which go beyond the mere having of a mental image.<sup>6</sup> He glosses the notion of pro ommaton poiein in Chapter 10 by saying that the speaker succeeds in this when he employs figures which project a sense of activity [energeia] (1411b27). The context in which Aristotle stresses the importance of activity aligns it with the related notions of productivity and movement [kinesis], and he especially praises the figures in Homer which represent something inanimate as if alive (e.g. the arrow "eager to fly") (1411b34). Qualities such as eagerness and the like are not, of course, proper to everything which is alive, but only to sentient, primarily human, life. Thus the explication of energeia in metaphor is progressively refined from the representation of movement, to the representation of something alive, to the more specific trope of personification. In addition, the importance of the quality of aliveness in metaphor in Chapter 10 is implicitly

---

<sup>6</sup> <sup>6</sup> Indeed, in a different context Aristotle denies that imagination [phantasia] alone is productive of emotion: "When we believe [doxasomen] something to be fearful or threatening, emotion is immediately produced, and so too with what is encouraging; but when we merely imagine we remain as unaffected as persons who are looking at a painting of some dreadful or encouraging scene." (De Anima 427b21-24).

This claim about phantasia may be in conflict with several passages in the Rhetoric, which come prior to the discussion of metaphor (e.g., 1370a28, 1378b10, 1383a17), but I will not enter into that here. Significantly, phantasia in the sense of imagination does not appear to be an element in Aristotle's account of metaphor and the effect of 'bringing before the eyes'.



counterpoised to the previous discussion of the need to avoid 'frigidity' [psychra] in one's style in Chapter 3 (see 1406a-b passim). The frigid metaphor fails to carry conviction [apithana], and the term 'psychra' carries with it connotations not only of what is cold, but more specifically of what is dead, unreal, and ineffectual. Finally, Aristotle's gloss of pro ommaton poiein in terms of energeia explicitly relates this virtue of metaphor not only to what is imagistic, in motion, alive and animated, but also to what is fully present and fully actualized. Thus the general discussion in Chapter 10 concludes: "the words should bring things before our eyes; they must give an impression of things happening in the present, not in the future. These three things should be aimed at: metaphor, antithesis, and vividness (or actuality) [energeia]" (1410b35).

Not surprisingly, then, there is a great deal packed into the single figure of pro ommaton poiein, as a metaphor for the functioning of effective metaphor. There are two issues in particular that an explication of these passages should clarify: first, what the specifically rhetorical advantage of these qualities is, and second, how the qualities of imagery and activity are presented as being related to each other. Paul Ricoeur's subtle reading of Aristotle on metaphor is one of the few contemporary discussions which gives due weight to the emphasis in the Rhetoric on setting something 'before the eyes', and he discusses this in connection with the emphasis on the representation of things in action, things moving as if alive (cf. pp. 34-5). But he understands the sense of activity exclusively as pertaining to that which is represented in the metaphor, and thus his reading of Aristotle here culminates in the speculation that "To present men 'as acting' and all things 'as in act' -- such could well be the ontological function of metaphorical discourse, in which every dormant potentiality of existence appears as blossoming forth, every latent capacity for action as actualized." (p. 43). Whatever may be ultimately at stake in this language, in restricting the sense of 'activity' to the side of what is represented it neglects the fact that the insistence on energeia is presented by way of explaining what is meant by 'setting before the eyes', and how it is achieved (1411b25). That is, pro ommaton poiein is recognized as itself a metaphorical expression and in need of elucidation, and the various senses of 'energeia' are presented as explications referring to the same phenomenon that the original visual metaphor gestures toward. The idea is not simply that the thing to be set before the eyes of the audience should be something shown in action, but also that we only learn what is meant by the figurative expression 'setting before the eyes' in this context by attending to the special requirement of activity both on the part of the responses of the audience as well as on the part of

the metaphorical subject.

Before considering an interpretation of the connection between imagery and activity along these lines, it will be helpful first to consider the prior question of how something imagistic, rather than discursive, may further the aims of the rhetorician. Some light is shed on this question by another modern writer, always worth consulting on these matters. Echoing Aristotle's language of "setting before the eyes", Kenneth Burke describes the strategic importance of the shifting between ideas and images in the workings of rhetoric.

There is a difference between an abstract term naming the 'idea' of, say, security, and a concrete image designed to stand for this idea, and to 'place it before our very eyes.' For one thing, if the image employs the full resources of imagination, it will not represent merely one idea, but will contain a whole bundle of principles, even ones that would be mutually contradictory if reduced to their purely ideational equivalents. Ideationally, a speaker might have to go through much reasoning if he wanted to equate a certain measure with public security. But if he could translate it imaginally into terms of, say, the mother, he might profit not only from this one identification, but from many kindred principles or ideas which, when approached in this spirit, are associated with the mother-image [...] Assume, for instance, that there are five major principles of appeal in a mother-image (security, affection, tradition, 'naturalness', communion). Then assume an ideological argument identifying a cause in terms of security, but not explicitly pleading for it in terms of these four other principles. Now, if the speaker, in winding up his argument for his cause as an aid to security, translates it into a mother image, might he not thereby get the 'unearned increment' from the other four principles vibrant in this same image?

(Burke, 1969), p. 87

First of all, what is profit and what is earning in this context? In simplest terms, the profit to the rhetorician is the gaining of the conviction of the audience about some matter. And this will be unearned to the extent that the speaker has not provided reasons for belief about this

matter, and, indeed, may not even have raised that particular matter explicitly for consideration.

What is the rhetorical importance of the fact that the profit is unearned from the standpoint of reason-giving? There are several aspects to this gain. One relatively superficial advantage is simply that the speaker is spared the trouble of arguing his case for each of the other four principles. This is a gain because he need not marshal his reasons, and, even more, because he may not have any such reasons in the first place. But it is not simply a matter of getting something for free. There is a more important gain from inexplicitness arising from the fact that it leaves the speaker free to disavow, at any later time, those implications or conclusions drawn from his image which he might later be obliged to defend or explain away. Burke suggests something of this when he mentions that certain elements of the image-cluster may contradict each other. The speaker is not responsible for resolving any such contradictions, and may selectively exploit them as he sees fit. Explicit, literal speech carries with it the risks and responsibilities of being right or wrong, justified or unjustified, in what one asserts. It is with respect to what one has explicitly asserted that one can, or can most easily, be charged with having claimed something false, or spoken in ignorance, or having said something inconsistent with one's previous words. Whereas to the extent that, instead of making some explicit assertion, the speaker provides an image before the eyes of the audience, whose implications they are to work out for themselves, he may profit from such implications as are useful to him, while privately reserving the right to disown any which might later be charged against his account.

There is a further general advantage in addressing an audience through something 'set before their eyes' rather than through literal, explicit assertion. In presenting his audience with an image for contemplation, the speaker appears to put them in the position of working out the

meaning of a phenomenon rather in the position of believing or disbelieving something they are being told. The imaginative activity on the part of the audience, as it moves among the five principles contained in the single image, may easily present itself to the mind as a process of discovery, something one is experiencing and working out for oneself, rather than as a matter of believing the report of some possibly unreliable or untrustworthy speaker. Hence, by employing such a figure, the speaker may hope to produce a sense of conviction on the part of his audience that does not rely on his own credibility.

Suppose this provides the beginnings of an account of the rhetorical importance of the contrast between something imagistic (or quasi-experiential) and something more discursive and literal.<sup>7</sup> We would now need to see how in Aristotle these virtues of the imagistic are related to the virtues of activity and animation [energeia] in effective metaphor. At the beginning of Chapter 11, Aristotle defines what he means by 'setting something before the eyes' of the audience, and how this is achieved, by reference to metaphors of activity and animation (1411b24-27). We saw that for Aristotle this connotes not merely movement, but primarily living activity, and indeed, the full-blown figure of personification. The rock of Sisyphus, the spears of the Trojans, no longer appear as inanimate objects, but now confront us as beings endowed with shamelessness, as longing to feed on human flesh. The transformation is thus in the direction from mere thing to a sentient being confronting us, provoking a response from us. Hence the 'activity' in question when something is figuratively 'set before our eyes' is not on one

---

<sup>7</sup> <sup>7</sup> For some more on the rhetorical advantages of metaphor as figure, see my 'Seeing and Believing: Metaphor, Image and Force', Critical Inquiry 16, (Autumn, 1989).

side only. Rather, it is part of what Aristotle says he means when he speaks of something 'set before the eyes' that the mind of the hearer is provoked, set into motion, and engaged imaginatively with the metaphor. 'Energeia' is thus not only on the side of what is depicted, but what is depicted is specifically figured as a living thing demanding some set of responses from the audience, some mental activity of its own. The specifically imagistic quality of 'live' metaphor only is so because of the responsive activity of the mind. (Here as elsewhere it is a mistake to think of mental imagery as the passive perception of an internal object, rather than as a particular imaginative activity.) The aim of pro ommaton poiein is to get one's audience to do various things, to imagine in a lively fashion which involves much associating, connecting, and emotional responding. By contrast, a 'frigid' style is both lifeless in itself and fails to move us (cf. chapter 3).

Such imaginative activity on the part of the audience contributes directly to the rhetorician's aim of persuasiveness. The 'profit' of his speech will be 'unearned' because, in part, it is the audience which is engaged in the productive labor of constructing and exploring various useful associative connections within the image. But the crucial advantage here is not simply the surplus value obtained by having others work for you, but rather the miraculous fact that shifting the imaginative labor onto the audience makes the ideas thereby produced infinitely more valuable rhetorically than they would be as products of the explicit assertions of the speaker.<sup>8</sup> They are the more valuable because the ideas derived from the image will be both more

---

<sup>8</sup> <sup>8</sup> In line with the economic metaphor, we should recall that the Greek term energos may also refer to productive land or capital.

memorable and less subject to suspicion for having been worked out by the audience themselves. And this rhetorical advantage of something image-like set before the eyes dovetails nicely with the previous one involving the avoidance of the commitments of explicit assertion. Presenting a picture whose full meaning is yet to be worked out gains the speaker many of the advantages of assertion without all the costs of reason-giving, commitment to logical consequences, etc. And it is because the implications of the image are developed through the imaginative activity of the audience themselves that the ideas elicited will borrow some of the probative value of personal discoveries, rather than be subjected to skepticism accorded to someone else's testimony. If there is any need to suppress the appearance of artifice here it is not because the audience is unaware that they are listening to a carefully composed speech, or that they are being addressed in deliberately contrived metaphors. But it may be that they need to be distracted from their own role in producing the conviction that the speaker is counting on. Aristotle's ambivalence about metaphor will then be explained by the fact that both its value as a vehicle of understanding, and the dangers of its rhetorical abuse, stem from the same features of its 'live' imagistic power.<sup>9</sup>

---

<sup>9</sup> <sup>9</sup> In writing this paper I have benefitted in various ways from conversation with Myles Burnyeat, Alexander Nehamas, Ruth Padel, Laura Quinney, and Amelie Rorty, for which I'm very grateful.

Richard Moran

Department of Philosophy

Princeton University



## Bibliography

Aristotle, The Complete Works of Aristotle, the revised Oxford translation, edited by Jonathan Barnes, (Princeton, 1984). Translation of the Rhetoric by W. Rhys Roberts. Translation of the Poetics by I. Bywater.

Aristotle, On Poetry and Style, translated by G.M.A. Grube, (Hackett, 1989).

Burke, Kenneth, A Rhetoric of Motives (University of California, 1969).

Lloyd, G. E. L., The Revolutions of Wisdom: Studies in the Claims and Practice of Ancient Greek Science, (University of California, 1987).

Moran, Richard, 'Seeing and Believing: Metaphor, Image and Force', Critical Inquiry 16, (Autumn, 1989), 87-112.

Padel, Ruth, In and Out of the Mind: Greek Images of the Tragic Self, (Princeton, 1992).

Padel, Ruth, 'Metaphor: The Fifth-Century Absence?', (manuscript).

Ricouer, Paul, The Rule of Metaphor, translated by Robert Czerny, (University of Toronto, 1975).

Becker, Andrew S., 'Reading Poetry Through a Distant Lens': Ekphrasis, Ancient Greek Rhetoricians, and the Pseudo-Hesiodic "Shield of Herakles", American Journal of Philology, vol. 113, no. 1, pp. 5-24.

Derrida, Jacques, Margins of Philosophy, translated by Alan Bass, (University of Chicago, 1982).

Shell, Marc, The Economy of Literature, (Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978).

## NOTES